

CONFIDENTIAL

22 September 1965

MEMORANDUM

The Current Position of Jews in the USSR

Soviet Jews are still discriminated against, both as representatives of an officially designated "nationality" and as "believers" in a religion recognized by Soviet laws.

Jews are still the only "national" minority in the Soviet Union lacking their own schools and permanent theaters. The 2,268,000 Soviets who claim Jewish "nationality" on their passports still have no Yiddish language newspaper. By contrast, the Maris, a Central Asian minority numbering 504,000 people, have 17 newspapers. In 1961 alone, 44 books were published in the Mari language, whereas the publication of books in Yiddish, which did not begin until 1959, has never been higher than three a year. There are still no research institutes devoted to preserving the history and culture of the Jews in the Soviet Union despite the cultural research done on other national minorities.

By comparison with other "religious cults" recognized by Soviet laws, Judaism has been especially penalized by the ban on the manufacture of religious ritual articles, such as prayer shawls. Also, only one small printing of the Jewish prayer book has been authorized. This was an edition of 3,000 copies in 1958. In the same year, the Baptists were authorized a Russian language Protestant Bible in 10,000 copies and the Moslems in Central Asia an edition of the Koran in 9,000 copies. The Russian Orthodox Church which itself labors under the difficulties encountered by all religions in the Soviet Union, nevertheless is allowed to produce such ritual objects as church vessels, vestments, beads, crucifixes, candles and ikons. A printing in 50,000 copies of the Russian Orthodox version of the Bible was authorized in 1957.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

A more pervasive (but more difficult to prove) form of discrimination appears in party and government appointments and in admissions to higher educational institutions. Jews are admitted to the Communist Party youth organization and to membership in the Party itself, but few hold office in these organizations.

One of the more obvious forms of discrimination has been the regime's suppression of reference to Hitler's special persecution of the Jews. The fiction that the death camps of Nazi Germany were populated entirely by prisoners of war is still maintained. Related to this is the fact that the catalogue of Stalin's crimes compiled since 1956 contains no reference to the terror he directed against Soviet Jews during the last four years of his life.

Since 1961, various liberal Soviet writers have tried to break through this ban, the most widely publicized effort being that made in 1961 by the young Soviet poet, Yevgeny Yevtushenko (not Jewish), in his poem "Babi Yar." (Babi Yar is a ravine outside Kiev which was the site of a Nazi slaughter of about 100,000 persons, of whom 90 percent were Jews). The poet and his poem were so harshly attacked for their insistence that anti-Semitism persists in the USSR that infrequent public presentations of the poem since have become a temperature gauge for judging the Soviet cultural climate.

There is considerable evidence of the regime's sensitivity to world opinion, at least in terms of protecting its public image. A particularly scurrilous attack on Judaism, published in 1964 as part of the continuing anti-religious campaign, was eventually criticized in the Soviet press and withdrawn for "correction" after Western expressions of shock and dismay. A Yiddish language magazine, intended as a bi-monthly, was established in 1961 in response to Western criticism. Each fall, it announces increasingly grandiose publishing plans for Yiddish language books, but its accomplishments have thus far been limited to three books a year.

There have also been promises of improvement for Judaism as a religion. For instance, Moscow Jews were able this year to obtain matzoh for the celebration of Passover after the difficulties they encountered last year were given wide publicity in the Western press.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

Sensitivity to Western criticism is also seen in an announcement last August by the Soviet Embassy here in Washington of plans to build a memorial at Babi Yar. Word of this was, however, released only to Washington correspondents, and existence of the plan has not been confirmed by Soviet officials elsewhere.

The most authoritative reaction to Western criticism was contained in a July speech by Premier Aleksey Kosygin, in which he called for friendship between the nationalities of the Soviet Union and specifically warned against anti-Semitism. This theme was repeated in a Pravda editorial in early September which has since been reprinted in a number of provincial newspapers.

CONFIDENTIAL

STAT

Approved For Release 2004/10/08 : CIA-RDP79T00472A000800010034-3

Next 1 Page(s) In Document Exempt

Approved For Release 2004/10/08 : CIA-RDP79T00472A000800010034-3